

TUCSON MUSEUM OF ART
LIBRARY

A HISTORY OF
THE J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE
AND
THE J. KNOX CORBETT FAMILY

by
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J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE

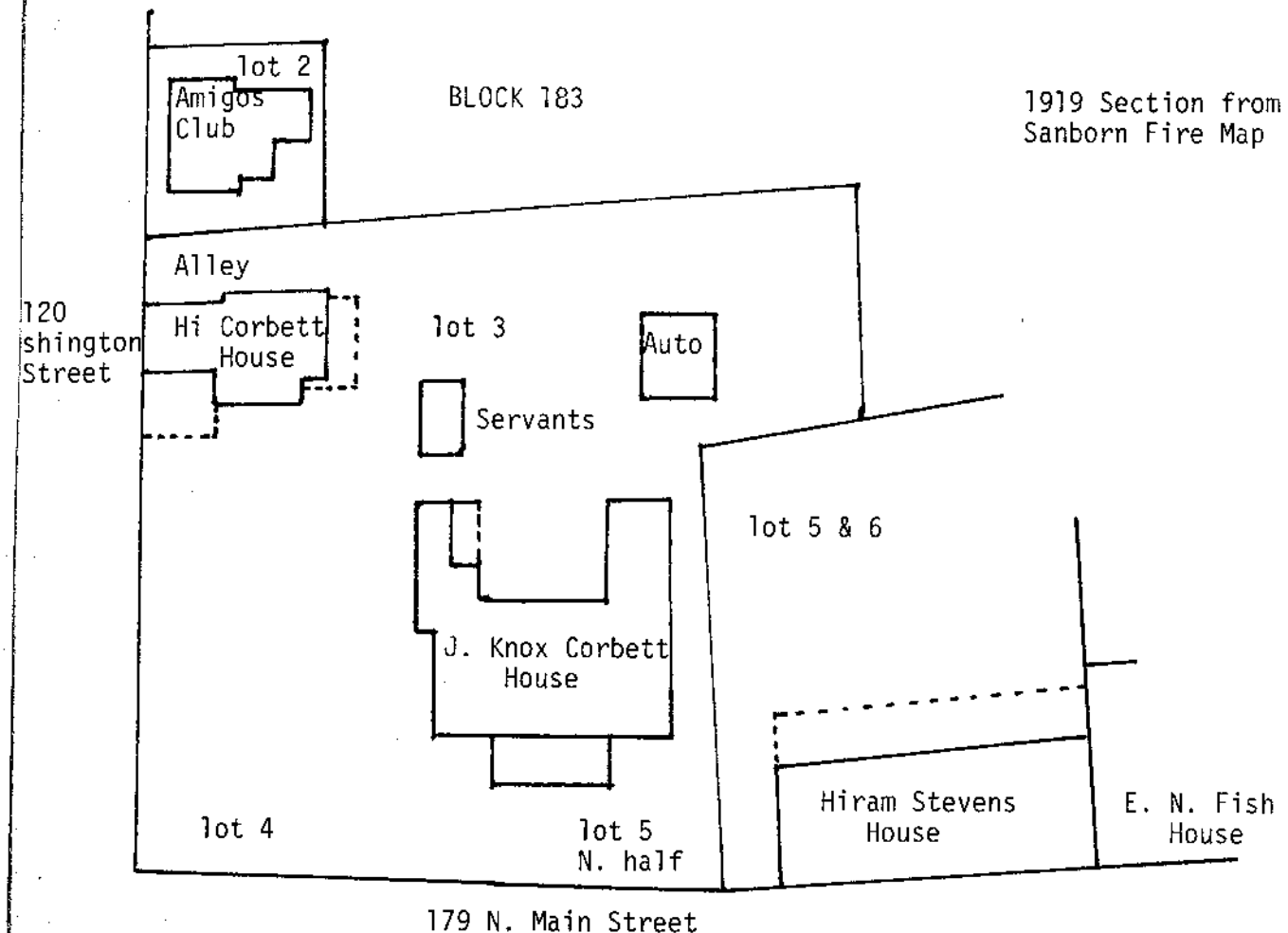
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Property History-----	p. 1
Property Deed Recordings-----	p. 7
Biography of J. Knox Corbett-----	p. 9
Biography of Lizzie Hughes Corbett-----	p. 15
Biography of Hiram Stevens Corbett-----	p. 17
Biography of Gulie Corbett-----	p. 22
J. Knox Corbett & Lizzie Hughes Corbett Family Tree-----	p. 25
Notes-----	p. 26
Bibliography-----	p. 28

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE

Property History Block 183 (S.W. Foreman Survey, Book 3 of Maps & Plats, p.70)
Lots 3, 4 and north half of 5.

Address: 179 North Main Street
Current address: 180 North Main Avenue



The J. Knox Corbett House was constructed in 1906 on three lots located in the present day "Tucson Museum of Art Block." The previous owner of the property, Hiram Stevens, purchased the land in 1874 and 1880. Four years later he deeded the property over to his wife Petra.¹

Petra was Mrs. Corbett's godmother and aunt. Hiram Stevens died in 1893 and

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE Property History

their daughter, Eliza, married in 1903, leaving Petra alone in her big house on Main Street. Mrs. Stevens was very fond of the Corbetts and, in 1905, decided to make them a gift of the property directly north of her, if they would build a house and live there. (She gave them the north half of lot 5 and parts of lots 3 & 4.)

Knox Corbett had owned property in the "TMA Block" as early as 1889, when he purchased a lot on Washington Street (lot 2) from Francisca Comandaran de Dia. In 1893, he sold the lot to his brother, William. Over the years Corbett acquired other property in the block that had belonged to Mrs. Stevens. In March 1908, he purchased land north and east of his house, leaving Mrs. Stevens with an alley from Washington Street to the center of the block (portions of lots 3 & 4). There was an old adobe house on the property at the corner of Main and Washington Streets, which he tore down to make room for a formal garden.² In September 1911, Mrs. Stevens sold Corbett additional land on Washington Street, west of the alley, (part of lot 3) which had frontage of 50 feet and a depth of 60 feet. The Corbetts deeded the lot over to their son, Hiram, as a gift, for the purpose of erecting a house for himself and family, but retaining the first right of purchase if Hiram ever desired to sell.³ In June, 1918, two years after Mrs. Stevens' death, Knox Corbett purchased the old Hiram Stevens House and the remaining Stevens property from her estate (south half of lot 5, lots 6 & north half of 7).⁴

The Corbetts leased the Stevens house as two apartments until the City threatened to condemn it. Fortunately, Hoagland and Margaret Gates, of Elkton, Maryland came to Tucson, fell in love with the property, and bought it in 1935.⁵ They completely renovated the old adobe and lived there for several years. In 1970, the City of Tucson condemned the property as part of its Urban Redevelopment program and three years later leased the entire block, including the Stevens & Corbett houses, to

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE
Property History

3.

The Tucson Museum of Art.

The Corbett house was completed in 1907 and was occupied by members of the Corbett family continuously until 1963, when Hi Corbett sold the house to W. Mercer Bouldin for his law office. Knox Corbett and his wife lived in the house for the duration of their lives. Corbett died in 1934 and Mrs. Corbett in 1936. Their daughter, Gulie; her husband William A. Bell and their son, Bill, lived there from 1921 until her death in 1945, at which time her family sold their interest to Gulie's brother, Hi. Hi Corbett and his wife, Ruth and daughter, also called Ruth, lived in the house until Mrs. Corbett died in 1960. Hi remarried and continued residing there for a time, but his new wife, Frances, did not like the home and they sold it in 1963.⁶

Around the turn of the century, Tucson became a boom town with houses going up everywhere. Architectural styles had gradually been changing since the arrival of the railroad in 1880. The influx of Anglo settlers with their eastern ideas and the availability of new building materials changed the look of Tucson.

In 1905, L. H. Manning and Leo Goldschmidt subdivided the land below Main Street, then known as "the Flats" and today referred to as "Snob Hollow." It became the prime location for exclusive residences. The L. H. Manning home still extant, though extravagantly enlarged and remodeled by the Elks Club, was the grandest of them all. The view from the Corbett house overlooked Snob Hollow and the Manning house. In October 1906, a local newspaper reported:⁷

Mr. Corbett's home on North Main promises to be one of the most attractive in the City with its overlook down the new driveway into the Valley Addition. Messrs. Holmes, who have this home in charge are also pushing as rapidly as possible on the work of the Cameron and Rockwell homes on West Franklin.

After shortages of materials and labor, the house was finally completed, July 1907.

The Corbett house was designed by David Holmes of Holmes and Holmes, a prominent Tucson architect from 1905 to 1912. Holmes was born in St. Louis, July 18, 1872.

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE Property History

and came to Tucson in 1898 as professor of the newly formed Arizona Territorial University. His first design project was Herring Hall, a modified Greek temple, built in 1903 on the University campus as a gymnasium, museum and library. Holmes' brother, Jessie, arrived in Tucson in 1905 and the two established their own architectural firm. Their style was simple and functional, with comfortable living spaces emphasizing precise craftsmanship.⁸ The brothers left their lucrative Tucson practice in 1912 and moved to San Diego. Remaining examples of their work can be seen on East Congress and the University campus. These include: The Chicago Store, Roskrige Junior High School, the Southern Pacific Depot and McArthur Hotel on Toole and the H. H. Rockwell and Samuel Kingan houses on Franklin Street.

The Corbetts choose a Mission Revival design for their two-story house (sometimes referred to as Spanish Mediterranean), a style that was popular in the early 1900's. The building was constructed of brick with a white stucco exterior. The Mission design is evidenced by its clay tile roof and arched front porch. The extensive ventilation openings in the attic space were designed to keep the house cool. The trim was painted green and the window awnings were green and white. A large formal garden once graced the west front and north sides of the house and an open court in back separated the house from the rear patio. Servants' quarters and a garage once were located to the rear of the house.

The main floor consisted of a living room, dining room, entrance hall and library. The light stained wood floor was from the Philippines. Walls were decorated with four inch stripes of dark wood, most of which has since been removed. The walls were originally painted white, but later wallpapered by Mrs. Hi Corbett, who removed the wood paneling. The first floor also included two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen and pantry. The kitchen had a wood stove and a chopping block in the center of the room. Upstairs was an unfinished activity room, screened sleeping porch and

thrilled and has treasured the piece ever since. Today a doorway has been punched into the wall where the buffet once stood.

The remainder of the house was furnished with European imports that formerly graced the Hiram Stevens house next door¹² and with overstuffed furniture common to many of the elegant houses of Tucson.¹³ "The house was always filled with friends and relatives. It was a meeting place for some of the clubs which held luncheons and dinner parties there," recalls Lizzie Corbett's sister, Mary Hughes Sheean. "It was always, a cheerful, happy household."¹⁴

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE
Property History

7.

Block 183 (S.W. Foreman Survey, Book 3 of Maps & Plats, p. 70) Lots 2,3,4,5,6,7

LOT 4

- 1839 Trinidad Barrios to Juan Grijalva for \$30 (1862 Tucson Property Record)
- Oct. 25, 1880 Antonio Grijalva to Hiram Stevens for \$1,200 (Pima County Deeds Book 9, p. 292).
- Aug. 9, 1884 Hiram Stevens (lots 3 & 4 and north half of 5) to Petra S. Stevens "for and in consideration of love and affection which said H. S. Stevens bears toward Petra S. Stevens and one dollar" (book 12, pp. 436-37).
- March 18, 1908 Petra S. Stevens, a widow to J. Knox Corbett (portions of lot 4 & 3) (Book 45, p. 236).
- Nov. 24, 1915 J. Knox Corbett to Lizzie H. Corbett, his wife, quit-claimed as gift to his wife (all parcels of land in block 183, including lots 3, 4 and 5 excepting parcel of land sold to H. S. Corbett on Sept. 13, 1911) (Book 62, p. 434).
- April 26, 1938 Estate of Lizzie Corbett to Hiram S. Corbett (son) & Gulie C. Bell (daughter) all property described above (Book 212, p. 115).
- Sept. 23, 1946 Estate of Gulie C. Bell to William A. Bell (husband) & Gulita C. Bell (daughter) & William C. Bell (son) her $\frac{1}{2}$ interest in the property described above. (Book 306 p. 494).
- Feb. 15, 1946 William C. Bell Jr. et al to Hiram S. Corbett property described above to H. S. Corbett (Book 304, p. 631).
- June 3, 1963 Hiram S. Corbett to W. Mercer Bouldin (Book 2110, p. 121-123).
- Aug. 4, 1970 W. Mercer Bouldin et al to City of Tucson (Book 3803 p. 472). "In the Superior Court of State of Arizona City of Tucson Plaintiff vs Mercer Bouldin, Southern Arizona Bank & Trust Co. as executor of the Estate of Hiram S. Corbett. Final order of condemnation."

LOT 3

- 1862 William S. Oury (1862 Tucson Property Records)
- Nov. 12, 1880 William S. Oury to Hiram Stevens (Book 9, p. 307).
- Aug. 9, 1884 Hiram Stevens to Petra Stevens (as listed above).
- Sept. 13, 1911 Petra S. Stevens to J. Knox Corbett, part of lot 3 (50 feet on Washington Street with 60 feet depth) (Book 52, p. 184).

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE
Property History

Block 183 (S. W. Foreman Survey, Book 3 of Maps & Plats, p. 70) Lots 2,3,4,5,6,7.

Lot 3 Cont.

- Sept. 13, 1911 J. Knox Corbett & Lizzie H. Corbett to Hiram S. Corbett, (same property on Washington Street) for purpose to provide for erection of a house for himself and family with first right to purchase if H. S. Corbett desires to sell. (Book 52, p. 184).
- July 14, 1924 Freda B. Corbett to Hiram S. Corbett, quit-claimed property on Washington Street (Book 99, p. 63).
- July 16, 1924 Hiram S. Corbett to Gulie Bell for \$10 (property described on Washington Street) (Book 100, p. 264).
- Sept. 23, 1946 Estate of Gulie C. Bell to William A. Bell et al (follows history of lot 4).

LOT 2

- March 17, 1874 City of Tucson to Jesus Dias
- Aug. 23, 1889 Francisca Comandaran de Dias to J. Knox Corbett (Book 15, p. 377).
- June 15, 1893 J. Knox Corbett and Lizzie Corbett his wife to William J. Corbett for \$100 (sold lot and buildings) (Book 32, p. 478-9). Filled by W. J. Corbett Jan. 11, 1902

LOTS: South half of 5, 6 & north half of 7 The Hiram Stevens House

- June 7, 1918 Mrs. J. Knox Corbett, extrx for estate of Petra Stevens to J. Knox Corbett (Book 67, p. 222).
- March 11, 1919 J. Knox Corbett & wife to Knox Realty Co. (Book 71, p. 46).
- Feb. 18, 1936 J. Knox Corbett Lumber & Hardware Co. to Hoagland Gates and Margaret Gates, his wife (Book 255, p. 391).

LOT 5

- July 2, 1918 City of Tucson to J. Knox Corbett, quit-claim deed, all of lot 5, block 183 (Book 67, p. 246).
"Records of the Village of Tucson---Sept. 12, 1872---deed no. 270 did convey all of lot 5, block 183, to Eliza A. Duffield and Milton B. Duffield. Title of property incomplete because of loss of original deed from Village of Tucson to Eliza A. & M. B. Duffield or the failure on part of original grantor to record said deed." (Hiram Stevens purchased lot 5 from the Duffield Estate in 1875-Deed Book 3 p. 38.)

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF J. KNOX CORBETT 1861-1934

Johnston Knox Corbett was born in Sumpter, South Carolina, June 20, 1861. He was born on the large family plantation where his mother, Gulie Britton, had been born and raised before him. The plantation home was built by his maternal grandfather, James J. Britton. His mother's family was of French descent. Some members had fought in the Revolutionary War for American Independence. His paternal grandfather, James Corbett, came from Scotland and settled in Charleston, South Carolina, where he became a successful linen manufacturer.¹⁵

James N. Corbett, father of J. Knox, was born in Sumpter, South Carolina, and lived there until he died in 1910. During the Civil War, he was a Union sympathizer, but was finally pressed into the service of the South as an assistant quarter master.¹⁶ He was a hardware merchant by profession, an occupation later taken up by his eldest son. Mr. Corbett had two children by a first marriage: William "Willie" J. Corbett, and Harry D. Corbett.¹⁷ By his marriage to Gulie Britton, there were seven children: George C., Leonard W., James N., J. Knox, Lizzie, Susan and Emma.¹⁸

During the Civil War the family lost the plantation¹⁹ and after the war it was difficult for the young men in the family to earn a living in the South.²⁰ So, one by one, a number of the children emigrated to Tucson, Arizona.

The first son, Willie Corbett, arrived in 1877. He worked for Lord & Williams, Dealers in General Merchandise, and in 1880 became assistant postmaster at \$200 a month.²¹ He resigned after five years and enlisted in the army helping to protect the country from the depredations of the Indian chief, Geronimo.²² He served as paymaster at Ft. Lowell and Ft. Huachuca and in 1889 met and married Belle Creary while stationed at army headquarters in Atlanta. Upon his return to Tucson in 1890, he purchased Pierce Ford's hardware store at the corner of Congress and Main street

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE
Biography of J. Knox Corbett

for \$3,500 and renamed it W. J. Corbett Hardware Company. The company was to become the most successful in the county and sold everything from farm implements to wagons to windmills. William Corbett died in 1919 and the company was merged with the J. Knox Corbett Lumber Company.²³ William and Belle had two sons: James N. and Franklin. James, a Tucson attorney, was the father of Mayor James N. Corbett.

The second son, Harry D. Corbett, followed his brother to Tucson in 1878. He brought his wife Rosa with him and soon after, the couple had two children, a daughter and a son. Harry joined his brother Willie at Lord and Williams. In a letter to his father, dated, April 2, 1881, Harry refers to the financial trouble his father is having:²⁴

I fully sympathize with you in this your hour of trouble, but truly I think you are unnecessarily alarming yourself for we will see you through all right. Knox will in all probability go to work on the first of May at a salary of \$15 per month and between the three of us we can tide you over the summer nicely...only don't worry yourself unnecessarily it will do no good. As for your coming out here it is too much of a risk to run. You might get employment but the chance would be against it.

Harry ran a grocery store at Stone and 6th Street for a time,²⁵ then grew restless and left Tucson in 1882 to try his luck in New Mexico and Colorado. He returned to Tucson in 1897 and purchased Heerman's Stationery Company on West Congress. Later he renamed it H. D. Corbett Stationery Co. He left Tucson in 1910 for Hawaii and in 1914 was appointed postmaster by President Woodrow Wilson. He died in Los Angeles in 1930.

Knox Corbett arrived in Tucson, January 1880. He was later followed by another brother, Leonard "Len", who served as assistant Tucson postmaster in 1886.²⁶ Len moved to Santa Paula, California where he ran a furniture store and People's Lumber Company. Leonard also owned and managed lemon groves. He was married to Ida. They had no children.

Two Corbett sisters, Lizzie and Emma, arrived in Tucson in 1899 and lived here

until they were married.

Knox Corbett was raised in Sumpter, South Carolina. When he was 14, he went to work for Samuel Graham in the lumber business.²⁷ In January 1880, he left his family home and joined his brothers, Willie and Harry in Tucson. Nineteen year old Knox was in poor health. When he arrived in Tucson he weighed only 100 pounds and was six feet tall. His parents thought he was suffering from tuberculosis, but his illness turned out to be a tapeworm from which he quickly recovered.²⁸ Soon after his arrival, Knox wrote his parents, describing his cross-county journey to Tucson.²⁹

The railroad will be finished in two weeks. I had to travel 60 miles in a stage driven by four mules. The citizens of Rincon (New Mexico) said we would never get out alive in this world again, for the Indians were on the warpath. Yesterday they robbed and killed the passengers, driver, threw the U.S. mail all over the plains and took the mules...two soldiers accompanied the stage and we got through all right. The Indians were on the tops of the mountains giving signals with a torch and yelling. Oh, it was awful.

In the same letter Knox described Tucson:

This is the best and most peaceful town I have seen since I left home. There are only three wooden buildings in the city all Doby (adobe). There are plenty of Indians in this town but they are all right. They walk in droves with the women behind with their baby tied on their back with their breast thrown over their shoulders and the babe sucking. Two and one half feet long is the length of their breast.

The Mexicans around the town that live on the main streets have their hens, pigs, goats and ducks and chickens run loose and the dogs run loose. The men sell wood around town on burros...Every day they sell water, 5¢ a bucket. They are getting rich. Harry has a well on his lot. He is well off.

February 4, 1882, Knox wrote home:³⁰

I am working in the P.O. (postoffice)...I get up in the morning at 5:00 o'clock and go to bed at 9:00, that is when I don't steal out to see my sweetheart.

Prior to clerking at the post office, Knox sold newspapers for the Arizona Daily Star at a salary of \$65 per month which was paid in meal tickets at the Chinese restaurant. The paper was operated by L. C. Hughes, uncle of his future wife, Lizzie Hughes. For a while he worked for his brother Harry at the grocery store.

Knox became dissatisfied with the low wage of postal clerk and in 1882, he borrowed money from the postmaster, Dr. H. C. Lord, and bought out the stage line which operated between Tucson and Silverbell, a thriving mining community. The venture was a financial success and before long he added a freight line. He employed a driver for the freight team and drove the stage himself. He sold the lines in a few years for a handsome profit.³¹

After visiting his family for three months in 1883, Knox returned to Tucson and obtained his old position in the post office. In 1886, Grover Cleveland entered the White House and Dr. Lord ceased to be postmaster. Knox lost his job. He bought a herd of cattle and became the owner of the Tres Alamos Ranch on the San Pedro River in the Rincon Mountains. Later he owned another ranch just across the line in Cochise county.³² He remained in the livestock business until 1898, when he sold out to give his full attention to the lumber business which he had founded in 1892.

In 1890, while working the Los Alamos ranch, Corbett received notice that he had been appointed postmaster of Tucson. He served in this position under four presidents: Harrison, McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft until 1914, at which time he resigned to give more time to his growing lumber business and other interests. When Knox resigned, his many Mexican friends (who called him "Noques") criticised him for his ill-advised move in selling such a profitable business as the postoffice. Knox had been postmaster consistently for 23 years and his friends had naturally thought he owned the business.³³

In 1885, Knox married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Hughes while he was still in the ranching business. He moved his bride to their new home on Court Plaza.³⁴ The couple was to have two children: Hiram Stevens, born in 1886, and Gulie, born in 1887. In the 1890's Knox built a home for his family at 229 East 8th Street and in 1906, constructed

a new house at 179 North Main, where he lived for the rest of his life.

Knox entered into his most ambitious business venture in 1892, when he purchased the block at 6th Avenue and the Southern Pacific tracks for \$475 and started a lumber yard. This location was greatly criticised by the local businessmen. They thought the property was too far from the center of town to be successful. The central business district was then at Congress and Main.

Right away the new business ran into trouble in the form of Tom Wilson, a 365-pound giant, who managed the Tucson Lumber Company. Wilson told Corbett in no uncertain terms that there wasn't enough room in Tucson for both businesses. Corbett cut his forces to one employee and he and his helper did all the work for four years. His wife kept the books and managed the office. Wilson retaliated with a price war and Corbett followed. At the end of four years, Wilson signed an agreement to maintain normal prices and posted \$500 guarantee of good faith.³⁵

The Lumber firm obtained the agency for the Union Ice Company in 1895 and shipped ice from Boca Lake in Northern California to Tucson, selling it for 2¢ a pound. Later they acquired the Standard Oil agency which they retained for 19 years. In 1902, the company incorporated as the J. Knox Corbett Lumber Co. It dealt exclusively in the sale of lumber and roofing materials.

In 1919, W. J. Corbett died and Knox took over his brother's hardware company at his widow's request.³⁶ He operated it in the same location for a time, under the name of W. J. Corbett Lumber & Hardware Co. In 1923, the two companies were consolidated at the 6th Avenue location and the new corporation was called J. Knox Corbett Lumber and Hardware Company.

In 1922, Corbett suffered a stroke and was forced to retire. He turned the business over to his son, H. S. Corbett, who had been working for the company since 1907 and had been general manager since 1909.

Corbett's illness left him with a partial paralysis and he walked with difficulty. His son ordered an electric cart from St. Louis and Knox could be seen driving all over town in it.³⁷ After his retirement, the Corbetts spent their winters in Los Angeles. They purchased a "magnificent suburban residence" in Westwood Hills.

During his active business years, Corbett participated in many outside interests. He served as Mayor of Tucson from 1914-17. He was an active Republican, having been secretary of the Territorial Republican Committee and chairman of the City Republican Committee. During his term of office as mayor, Corbett inaugurated the City Manager form of government under which Tucson operates today.

Other interests included: President of Citizen Publishing Co., publisher of the Tucson Daily Citizen, one term of office on the Tucson School Board, founder and director of the Tucson Building and Loan Association, Vice President of Tucson Milling Company, and secretary for his brother's H. D. Corbett Stationery Store. Corbett was a member of the Lodge of the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks and the Arizona Pioneer's Historical Society.

In his 50th year in Tucson (1929), Corbett reminisced about his long and successful business career:³⁸

Until I married and settled down in a home, I had never paid out a cent for lodging. My earnings came hard when I was a youngster, and they were never wasted on a place to sleep---It is hard to associate the busy life of this modern, thriving city with the lawless days of Apache raids.

J. Knox Corbett died in Tucson, April 23, 1934.

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF LIZZIE HUGHES CORBETT 1864-1936

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Hughes was a native Tucsonan. She was the eldest child of Sam Hughes and Atanacia Santa Cruz, both distinguished pioneers.

Sam Hughes, Lizzie's father, was born in Pembrokehire, Wales in 1829, the son of Samuel and Elizabeth (Edwards) Hughes, natives of the same place. His paternal grandfather and great-grandfather, both named Samuel, were owners of a large estate in Wales. In 1837, the Hughes family emigrated to Pennsylvania.³⁹

In 1850, young Sam left the east to seek his fortune in the California gold fields. Injured in a mining accident, Hughes was compelled to seek a more congenial climate. He arrived in Tucson in March 1858 by wagon pack train at a time when there were only five Anglo men living here. He became one of the outstanding figures in the frontier community. He helped to organize the first bank in Tucson and was responsible for helping establish Tucson's first public school. One of the incorporators of Tucson as a municipality, Sam served seven years as alderman, but refused the mayorship. "My hobby was to make a town," he was once quoted as saying.⁴⁰

Atanacia Santa Cruz, Lizzie's mother, was born in Tucson, August 4, 1850. She was the daughter of Juan Santa Cruz and Manuela Borquez, both second generation Tucsonans born within the presidio walls. Her father served as a soldier in the Spanish and Mexican wars. Her great-grandfather was born in San Sebastian Spain and came to Mexico in 1760 as a Conquistador in the Spanish army.⁴¹ Atanacia's parents died when she was an infant. She was a young girl living with her sister, Mrs. Hiram (Petra) Stevens, when she met Sam Hughes shortly after his arrival in Tucson. Sam and Atanacia were married at San Xavier Mission, May 27, 1862 when she was only 12 years old and he was 33. The Hughes had 15 children, ten of whom lived to adulthood. Lizzie was the first born and had five sisters: Maggie, Emma, Jessie, Attie and Mary; and four brothers: Sam, David, Tom and James. None of the brothers

ever married. The Hughes home still exists today at 233 North Main Avenue just north of the Corbett House. Hughes acquired the property in 1864 from his brother-in-law, Hiram Stevens,⁴² and lived there until his death in 1917. Atanacia continued to live in the house until her death in 1934, at which time she left the house to her seven living children.

According to Lizzie, she was the first Anglo child born in the frontier community and she became one of its best known women. As the daughter of Sam Hughes, she was one of the first students in the school system her father was responsible for establishing in 1873. She attended a girls school in Tennessee and was an accomplished musician, taking part in Tucson's social and musical affairs.⁴³

As a girl Lizzie was considered beautiful. When she grew older, she became very stout and her grandchildren recall that she weighed 350 pounds. J. Knox II remembers that his grandmother was "a very dominant person who controlled the family. Her brothers and sisters looked to her for advice. She had a lot more to say about the family lumber business than my grandfather did," he said.⁴⁴ One of her closest acquaintances, Katherine Knabe, describes Lizzie as "a very fine woman, a very social person, who liked to give parties and have people around her."⁴⁵

The Corbetts had two children: Hiram Stevens and Gulie. In addition, the Corbetts raised their granddaughter, Gulita Caperton (Gulie's daughter) and for several years, they had their grandson, Knox Corbett II (Hiram's son), living with them in their California home.

Mrs. Corbett died November 25, 1936. Her estate was divided between her two children. Each received a half interest in the Corbett house, a seventh interest in the Sam Hughes house and an undivided interest in 104,374 shares of common stock of Knox Realty Corporation (holding company for J. Knox Corbett Lumber & Hardware Co.), which were acquired March 15, 1919.⁴⁶

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF HIRAM STEVENS CORBETT 1886-1968

Hiram "Hi" Stevens Corbett was born in Tucson, September 13, 1886. He was named for his uncle Hiram S. Stevens, one of Tucson's most distinguished pioneers. Hiram Stevens was married to Petra Santa Cruz and [^] eldest child, Lizzie, was Hi Corbett's mother. In many ways Hi took after his namesake; like his uncle, he became a leading Tucson businessman and public servant. Hiram S. Stevens and Hiram S. Corbett were wealthy men in their time, enjoying their economic successes to the fullest. Their lives both ended with financial problems that saw them in greatly reduced circumstances. Neither had much in material goods to pass on their families, but their lives were both brilliant and each in his way contributed immeasurably to Tucson's history and growth.

Hi was educated in Tucson and attended the University of Arizona for the first year of high school, when the University had a preparatory department. He completed high school at Belmont Military Academy in Palo Alto California. He received a football scholarship to Stanford University and attended for two weeks when he was notified by his high school that he did not have enough credits to go to college. His father pulled him out of Stanford and sent him to Heald's Business College in San Francisco.⁴⁷ Just a few months before his graduation, the 1906 earthquake destroyed the school.

Hi returned to Tucson and for a short time went to work for the Southern Pacific Company as a freight clerk. Next he went into business taking a partnership in the Pioneer Automobile Company. In 1907, he began driving horse-drawn lumber wagons for his father's company. He worked in the office for a time and became manager of J. Knox Corbett Lumber Co. in 1909. As a bachelor, he lived at Los Amigos Club in a house on Washington Street behind the Corbett house on property formerly owned by his father.

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE
Biography of Hiram Stevens Corbett

Corbett was drafted in World War I, but because of a flu epidemic, did not start for training camp until the morning the armistice was signed. Returning from the army, Hi became manager of the W. J. Corbett Hardware Co., his uncle's concern. In 1919, W. J. Corbett died and Knox Corbett took over his brother's company. In 1923, the two companies were merged and Hi became president of the enlarged concern, now called J. Knox Corbett Lumber and Hardware Co. The hardware company was relocated to North 6th Avenue and both operations were operated under one roof in a new structure built for that purpose. Hi announced that the former plant at Main Avenue and Congress Street would be remodeled and operated as a market and that he planned to make Main and Congress the center of the City's market activities as it was a number of years earlier.⁴⁸ Hi Corbett's dream was to departmentalize the building material business in Tucson and bring under one establishment the most complete facilities for builders and contractors in the southwest.⁴⁹ Besides lumber, roofing and building supplies, the company had a plumbing, heating and sheet metal department. These additional departments were closed in 1937 as too costly to continue.

William A. Bell, Hi's brother-in-law, joined W. J. Corbett Hardware Company in 1919 as auditor, later joining the staff of the J. Knox Corbett Lumber and Hardware Co. when the two firms merged, as secretary and treasurer. William's son, William "Bill" Corbett Bell, also worked for the company starting in 1946. In 1955, Hi expanded the company by building a branch store at 4545 E. Speedway. Bill managed the Speedway store and in 1961 became general manager of the entire company.

Hi retired in 1963, after 52 years with the organization. The company purchased his shares of stock. Hi's son Knox left the company at the same time. He had worked there since 1928 and had been vice president and sales manager of the building supply section. Bill became president and general manager of the firm and his father stayed on as secretary. James N. Corbett, grandson of W. J. Corbett continued to work as

sales manager.

Hi Corbett came from a politically active family. Hi's uncle Hiram Stevens had served as delegate to the United States Congress. His grandfather, Sam Hughes, actively participated in local politics and his father, Knox Corbett had served as mayor of Tucson. It is not surprising then that Hi also followed in the family tradition. He first ran for office when he was only 21 years old and lost. When he was 23, he ran for city treasurer and was beaten by one vote. His greatest success in politics, however, lay in running others for office instead of himself. Hi served as county and state chairman of the Republican party and from 1928-32, was Republican National Committeeman. Corbett served six terms as Arizona State Senator from 1953-64. He was appointed senator, at age 66, by the County Board of Supervisors to serve out the unexpired term of the late Senator James W. Ewing.

Corbett was probably best known as the "man who brought baseball to Arizona." Hi Corbett Field was named in his honor in 1950 because of his work in baseball and his help in funding the Cactus League whose purpose it was to bring the major leagues to Tucson for spring training. In high school, Hi played football and baseball. When he returned to Tucson, he played baseball on several local teams. The games played at Elysian Grove would draw up to 1,000 spectators.

Hi was equally enthusiastic about golf, a sport first introduced to Tucson in 1915. The first course was established at the Tucson Country Club at Speedway and Campbell. In those days the greens were made of oiled sand. Hi won the Tucson Country Club championship and the Southwest Championship in 1923. El Rio Golf Club was founded in 1929 on west Speedway by Hi and two other local businessmen. The three men promoted it as part of a real estate development, but because of its location it never caught on. "It was on the wrong side of the tracks," recalls old timer, Roy Drachman. The developers finally gave up selling large lots and

sold the land facing the golf course in small lots to Mexican-American families who lived in the area. There was no sewer to the area and every home had an out-house in back facing the golf course. According to Drachman, a famous golfer, Babe Zaharias, was to have said, "Most country clubs have mansions facing the course, but this is the only one I've ever seen that has shit houses facing the fairway."⁵⁰

Besides his successful business and political career and active interest in promoting sports in Tucson, Hi still had time for numerous other activities. He was president of the Arizona Lumber Dealers Association. He was director of the Tucson Chamber of Commerce for six terms and president in 1924. He was organizer and director of the Sunshine Climate Club, whose purpose it was to bring new businesses to Tucson. Hi served as president of the Old Pueblo Club, vice president of the Citizen Publishing Company and director of the Consolidated National Bank. He also served as president of El Rio Golf Club, and was a member of the Masons, Knights Templar and the Elks Lodge. For a time he was director of the Tucson Gas and Electric Light and Power Comapny and the Federal Reserve Bank of El Paso. He served as vice president of People's Lumber Company of Ventura, California, his brother's company, and was for thirteen consecutive years a member of the Selective Service Board. Corbett was presented with three separate University of Arizona honors in recognition of his work in the cause of higher education. As senator, he was father of the bill that got the medical school for the University. Micheline Keating wrote of him in the Tucson Citizen:⁵¹

He gives the impression of friendliness, a man easy to know and to like. Where he finds time for the activities, vocational and avocational, that measure his days, puzzles even those who know him best.

Lynn Meyers Harris describes her grandfather as: "a very large man, around five feet ten, who always wore a white shirt and tie and smoked constantly. He loved to gossip and tell jokes."⁵²

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE
Biography of Hiram Stevens Corbett

Corbett was married four times and had two children. His first wife was Dorothy Udall, by whom he had a son, J. Knox Corbett, II, born June 4, 1911. They lived at 120 West Washington Street behind the Corbett House on property given them by his parents. Hi and Dorothy were divorced in 1915. She moved to the mid-west and took Knox with her. Later Knox went to live with his grandparents, Knox and Lizzie Corbett in California in 1922-1924. Hi was briefly married to Freda B. Curtaz. They were divorced and in 1925 he married Ruth Weissinger. They had a daughter Ruth Elizabeth born March 19, 1928. Young Knox lived with them from 1925 to 1937. The Corbetts moved into the Main Street home in 1945. Mrs. Corbett died in 1960 after suffering from a heart ailment for several years. Lynn Harris recalls that her grandmother was "sweet, gentle and frail, everything her large extraverted grandfather was not,"⁵³ Hi met Frances Conger Ruppelius in Phoenix while serving as state senator and married her. They sold the family home on Main Street, and moved to a trailer on Prince Road.

Despite his many remarkable activities and achievements, Hi became over-extended financially in his later life, as a result of paying less attention to his business than he did to his many civic commitments and to enjoying the good life that came with his personal success. Hi, and his father before him, built a very successful business in the J. Knox Corbett Lumber Co. and they lived well because of it. But ultimately the company suffered. Over-burdened with debts, the next generation, with all its best efforts, could not make it survive and the J. Knox Corbett Lumber and Hardware Company was forced to close in 1965.

Hiram S. Corbett died July 5, 1967, at the age of 80. He left a wife, son and daughter and four grandchildren: J. Knox III and Michael Corbett (the children of Knox and Jacqueline Corbett) and Lynn and Christina Meyer (the children of Ruth and Edward J. Meyer) and one great grandson, J. Knox Corbett IV.

J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF GULIE CORBETT 1887-1945

Gulielma "Gulie" Corbett was educated in Tucson and in Memphis, Tennessee, where she studied music at Ward Belmont School. In March 1911, she married Joseph Colbert Caperton. "Tucson has rarely seen a more beautiful bride than was Miss Gulielma Corbett."⁵⁴ Following the service at the Presbyterian Church the intimate friends of the family were received at the Corbett house on Main Street. "The house was beautifully decorated, the spacious front piazza being canvassed."⁵⁵

Joe Caperton had come to Tucson in 1910. He was employed as manager of Bell Drug Company and he and his bride lived in the family home at 179 North Main.⁵⁶ The couple had a daughter, Gulita. After two years of marriage the Capertons were divorced and in 1917, Gulie married William A. Bell. Joe Caperton moved away and later became general manager of Massachussets Life Insurance Company.⁵⁷

Gulie's daughter, Gulita, was raised in California by her grandparents; Knox and Lizzie Corbett. She attended West Lake School for Girls and University of California at Los Angeles. Gulita married Bill Cooper and had two children: Gulianne and Bill Junior.

William A. Bell, Gulie's second husband, came to Tucson in 1907 as a mining engineering student from University of Illinois. He stayed in Arizona, "fascinated by the new west and determined to establish himself in Tucson."⁵⁸ The first place he sought work was J. Knox Corbett Lumber Company, but they had no job for him. Thirteen years later he was an executive of the firm.

Bell was employed as credit manager of Steinfeld's Department Store and later was made retail manager. He and Harold Steinfeld were close friends and roommates. Along with Hi Corbett, they lived together at Los Amigos Club, located directly behind the Corbett house. It was at this time that William met Gulie. After their marriage, he built a house for his bride at 490 Granada Street. However, Gulie

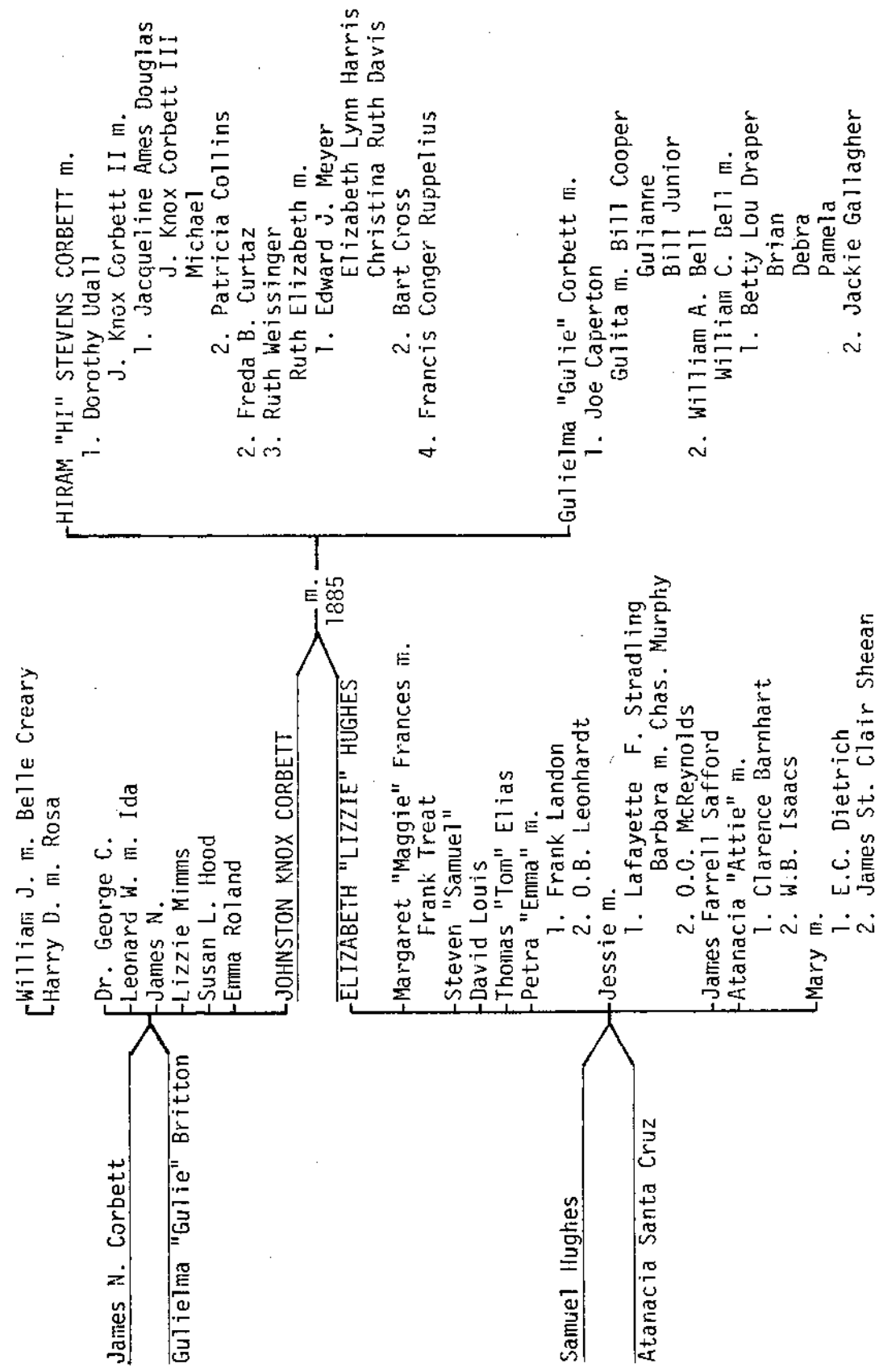
preferred living in her parents' home while they were in California.⁵⁹ After her mother's death in 1936, the Bells lived permanently in the Corbett house.

William Bell joined the air force in World War I and was stationed in New York and Detroit in connection with the production of airplanes. In 1919, he returned to Tucson and became auditor for the W. J. Corbett Hardware Company. He joined J. Knox Corbett Lumber & Hardware Company after the merger of the two firms, serving as secretary and assistant general manager.⁶⁰

Gulie Bell was an avid golfer and a local golf champion. She was a charter member of the Service Club (forerunner of the Junior League of Tucson). For a time she was in charge of the Service Club's circulating library, operating in Steinfeld's Department Store. Gulie was known as an exceptionally pretty woman who was very much a part of Tucson society.

The Bells had a son, William "Bill" Corbett Bell, born September 2, 1921. Bill was raised in the Corbett house, living there until his mother's death in 1945. Bill went to Tucson High School and the University of Arizona. Following service in the Air Corps, he returned to Tucson in 1947 and went to work with his father at J. Knox Corbett Lumber Co. He became manager of the company's East Speedway store in 1955 and general manager when his uncle, Hi Corbett retired. Due to financial problems the company closed December 31, 1965.⁶⁰ Bill bought his cousin, James N. Corbett's stock in the company in 1970. (James and his brother, Franklin, had inherited stock in their father's W. J. Corbett Hardware Company and in the merged lumber and hardware companies. Franklin had sold his stock to Hi Corbett years before.) Bill and Gulita still retain the real estate on North 6th Avenue where the company was founded by J. Knox Corbett in 1892. Bill married Betty Lou Draper and they had three children: Brian, Debra and Pamela. The couple divorced and Bill is presently married to Jackie Gallagher.

Gulie Corbett died April 18, 1945, at the age of 58. At the time of her death, she owned 1228.60 shares of capital stock in the J. Knox Corbett Lumber Company which had been left to her by her mother.⁶² She in turn left the stock to her husband and two children, each receiving an equal share. Gulie owned a half interest in the Corbett house which her family inherited. Her heirs sold the house and furnishings to Hi Corbett, who owned the other half interest.



J. KNOX CORBETT & LIZZIE HUGHES CORBETT

FAMILY TREE

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J. KNOX CORBETT HOUSE

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NOTE:

AHS - Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona
TMA - Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, Arizona.

All Tucson Museum of Art research, including personal interviews, original family documents, and family photographs, is on file at the Tucson Museum of Art Library.